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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS: "OFFICIAL" CAMPAIGN BEGINS - BLEAK
FORECASTS FOR RACAN COALITION

Classified By: Poloff A.F.Godfrey for reasons 1.5 (b,d)

Summary

[11.](#) (C) On November 6, Croatia's State Electoral Commission published the approved lists of candidates for the November 23 parliamentary election. This act serves as the official starting gun for the formal campaign, which means rules governing equal access to state media now apply. Polls suggest that the parties which made up the Racan government are in trouble. While the election will be very close, a coalition led by the right-wing HDZ may win enough seats to form a government. End Summary.

Five Thousand Candidates for 160 Seats

[12.](#) (C) Political parties and independent candidates had until midnight of November 3 to submit lists of candidates to Croatia's State Electoral Commission (SEC) in order to participate in upcoming elections. After a 48-hour review period, the SEC released the names of more than 5,000 candidates who will compete for seats in Croatia's next parliament. Each list for the ten geographical electoral districts and the one "diaspora" list contained fourteen names. While it is relatively easy to have a list approved by the SEC (in the central Zagreb district, voters will be confronted with 40 different lists), a list must receive at least five percent of the vote to qualify to divide the 14 seats in an electoral district.

SDP Helping Friends in Need

[13.](#) (C) The candidate lists reflect last-minute coalitions between the coalition-leading Social Democratic Party (SDP) and two smaller parties which had been faithful members of PM Racan's reform government. Racan (as president of the SDP) ceded spots high on his party's list to members of the Liberal Party (LS) and the Libra party. Igor Dragovan, Secretary General of the SDP, told us his party expected

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little return in terms of votes, but was taking the step in order to ensure that a "liberal option" was preserved as a parliamentary party in the next Sabor.

HDZ Candidates Include Nationalist Dinosaurs...

[14.](#) (C) Croatia's two largest parties, the SDP and the right-wing nationalist HDZ followed through on pledges to shake up their parliamentary delegations. Less than half of the MP's in their current parliamentary caucuses made the lists for this election. HDZ President Sanader told the Ambassador the makeup of their list would demonstrate that the HDZ has become a modern, democratic party. But in fact, while there are many new names, the HDZ has placed high on their lists individuals who epitomize the worst stereotypes of the Tudjman era abuses, including a suspected war criminal (Branimir Glavas), an active opponent of refugee return (Zadar Governor Sime Prtenjaca) and a kleptocrat (HDZ caucus whip Vladimir Seks).

SDP Turns to WWF for Name Recognition

[15.](#) (C) SDP leaders told us they planned to get rid of MP's who made insufficient substantive contributions to the work of the last parliament and to professionalize their caucus. But they placed Mirko Filipovic, a champion of the brutal sport called "ultimate fight" most popular in Japan (where he is known by the nom de guerre "Cro-Cop"), high on their list for the Zagreb city district. Filipovic, who has no background in politics, may add name recognition to the SDP, but he will surely alienate the urban, educated voters which make up the core of the SDP.

Polls Show HDZ Could Form Government

16. (C) Because of differences in polling techniques (and levels of professionalism), opinion poll results in the Croatian press can vary by as much as 20 percent. However, all show that the HDZ is holding its commanding lead as the largest individual party. We met on November 7 with the directors of Croatia's most reliable polling firm. They said that the HDZ continues to poll at 28 percent, with the SDP and its election partners trailing far behind at 19 percent. The HSS will continue to play the role of "kingmaker" and is polling at a solid 11 percent. HNS is slipping, and now barely polls at eight percent.

17. (C) The percentage of voters who say they intend to vote but are still undecided is now only 12 percent; this figure continues to shrink as the date for elections approaches. IRI pollsters told us that a low turnout would favor the HDZ; with turnout now predicted at only 65 percent, the SDP and its partners need to work harder to get out the vote. As it stands now, if the other right-wing parties which would be likely coalition partners for the HDZ (including the extreme nationalist Croatian Party of Rights - HSP) continue to hold their ground, the HDZ could win enough seats in parliament to form a coalition government with a slim majority.

Coalition Parties Holding on to Hope

18. (C) The parties which formed the Racan government have not given up hope. HNS Secretary General Boris Blazejkovic told us that his party's polling numbers are infuriatingly variable, since they rely on the urban youth vote which is least likely to turn out for elections. SDP leaders admit that this will be a tight race, but express confidence that Croatian voters will remember the dreadful state of the country's economy when the SDP-led government took office three years ago.

Electoral Process Efficient, Transparent

19. (C) Despite the closeness of the race, all of its contestants seem to be playing by the rules. All of the election deadlines have been met, and OSCE's long-term observers are being granted access to all levels of the process. Croatia's SEC allows NGO monitors to attend all of its sessions and publishes all decisions immediately on a modern website. The Croatian Helsinki Commission (tasked by OSCE to conduct media monitoring) reported to the press on November 5 that the campaign has been portrayed by the media in a "fair and balanced" manner.

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